



Erin Brockovich (Steven Soderbergh, USA 2000)

Erin Brockovich is a single mother who is desperately looking for a job. To complicate matters further, she has an accident and loses the ensuing lawsuit due to the judge's personal prejudice. She then approaches the lawyer who defended her case and he gives her work as a clerk in his office to help her out of her situation. Erin's curiosity and determination during her routine office work lead her to uncover what will prove to be a major case for the law firm.

Ethics in Business

In the business world, if there is a complex and controversial subject it is what is called **ethics in business**. When ethics must face economics, way too often ethics grows thin and loses consistency— even though we will all deny it ad nauseam.

In this film, a major utility company is found to have contaminated the drinking water of a community due to hexavalent chromium present in cooling water stored in unlined ponds and which then filters down into the groundwater, causing gastrointestinal, liver and kidney disorders among the local population.

Once the serious incident had been detected, more significant than the economic cost that cutting off the water supply would have implied are a series of health and social repercussions that, from the company's viewpoint, are not worth giving the weight they deserve. It's a clear case of abuse of a dominant position, due to the power of the company, versus that of working class citizens trying to defend their rights and their health.

Although this is an extreme situation, it serves as a guide to open up the discussion; naturally, none of us would put our own company's interests ahead of the health of our customers! However, it is not so rare for some businesses –especially when times are tough– to give in to the temptation to relax their ethical standards and tiptoe right over them when facing cost decisions.

Let's consider it another way. Without going as far as false advertising, the question of half-truths, overrating the qualities of something, or simply saying that its content or functions are different than what we know to be true, are realities not so foreign in the business world.

By way of an illustration, one of the most flagrant examples, according to experts, would be the "magnetic bracelets". They were sold by the millions only a few months ago with claims to their curative and energizing properties. In the end there was no truth whatsoever to this power, although no negative effects have been attributed to them either. Let's say that their promoters, if they were aware of what they were doing, could have been playing outside the boundaries of ethics.

Premeditation is not necessarily to blame. Often quality controls are simply not as reliable or thorough as they ought to be. It's true that all sorts of reasons can be given, such as costs, ignorance, lack of time or any other justification, but we all want whatever we purchase to give the performance, effects or duration promised us at the time of purchase. And if this is what we want when we are consumers ...

Well, none of us likes to be taken for a ride. And we shouldn't forget this when we are the ones making the sale.

As consumers we are all conscious of this and we increasingly appreciate value labels such as fair trade, non-transgenic food, socially responsible companies, etc. After all, there must be something more than simply making money... Or at least we'd like there to be.